

Supporting Question 3: What did Southerners say about secession?

Supporting Question	What did Southerners say about secession?
Formative Performance Task	Create a Venn diagram and construct an evidence-based claim that answers the supporting question.
Featured Sources	<p>Source A: “Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union,” Excerpt (1860).</p> <p>Source B: “Who Is Responsible for this War?” by Alexander H. Stephens, Excerpt (1861).</p> <p>Source C: “Nashville Convention Speech” by Robert Rhett, Excerpt (1850).</p> <p>Source D: “Thanksgiving Sermon” by B.M. Palmer, Excerpt (1860).</p> <p>Source E: “Corner Stone Speech” by Alexander H. Stephens, Excerpt (1861).</p>

THE THIRD SUPPORTING QUESTION— “What did Southerners say about secession?”— pushes students to further investigate the viewpoints of influential Southerners on the issue of secession. While the sources here represent a range of southern arguments about secession, they are by no means exhaustive.

A NOTE ON THE FEATURED SOURCES: Arguments about slavery from the 19th century are often deeply racist. It is important to prepare students before diving into these sources so that they know what to expect. You should also consider how you’ll address the racism of some of these arguments in your class discussion.

FEATURED SOURCE A was issued only four days after the broadside from Supporting Question 2 was published. Students should review the document to determine the reasons that South Carolina provided to justify its secession.

FEATURED SOURCE B is an excerpt from a speech delivered by Alexander H. Stephens in 1861 to the Secession Convention of Georgia and reprinted in the *Southern Almanac*. In it, Stephens argues against a war and suggests that compromise is still attainable.

FEATURED SOURCE C is drawn from a speech that Robert Rhett, a senator from South Carolina, gave over a decade before secession. In his address to the Nashville Convention in 1850, Rhett encouraged his fellow Southerners to secede rather than compromise with free states.

FEATURED SOURCE D is an excerpt of the 1860 “Thanksgiving Sermon” of New Orleans Reverend B.M. Palmer. In the widely-reprinted sermon, Palmer uses religion as a justification for slavery and calls on his listeners to support the Confederate cause.

FEATURED SOURCE E is an excerpt from the famous 1861 “Corner Stone Speech” by Alexander H. Stephens. In it, Stephens argues that slavery and white supremacy are foundational U.S. values.

THE THIRD FORMATIVE PERFORMANCE TASK asks students to fill out part of a Venn diagram summarizing the southern arguments about secession. Students should fill out only half of the diagram: they will complete it as the formative task for Supporting Question Four. Once half of the Venn diagram is finished, students should create a claim (preferably one sentence) that answers the supporting question.

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Source A: “Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union,” Excerpt (1860). Available through the Teaching Hard History Text Library.

Under this Confederation [Articles of Confederation] the war of the Revolution was carried on, and on the 3rd of September, 1783, the contest ended, and a definite Treaty was signed by Great Britain in which she acknowledged the independence of the Colonies ... thus were established the two great principles asserted by the Colonies, namely: the right of a State to govern itself; and the right of a people to abolish a Government when it becomes destructive of the ends for which it was instituted.

[...] By this Constitution, certain duties were imposed upon the several States, and the exercise of certain of their powers was restrained, which necessarily implied their continued existence as sovereign States. But to remove all doubt, an amendment was added, which declared that the powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States, respectively, or to the People.

[...] In the present case, the fact is established with certainty, We assert the fourteen [Northern] of the States have deliberately refused, for years past, to fulfill their constitutional obligations, and we refer to their own Statutes for the proof.

The Constitution of the United States, in its fourth Article, provides as follows: “No person held to service or labor in one State, under the laws thereof, escaping into another shall, in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from such service or labor, but shall be delivered up, on claim of the party to whom such service or labor may be due.”

This stipulation was so material to the compact, that without it that compact would not have been made. The greater number of the contracting parties held slaves, and they have previously evinced their estimate of the value of such a stipulation by making [slavery] a condition [outlawed] in the Ordinance of the government of the territory ceded by Virginia, which now composes the States north of the Ohio River.

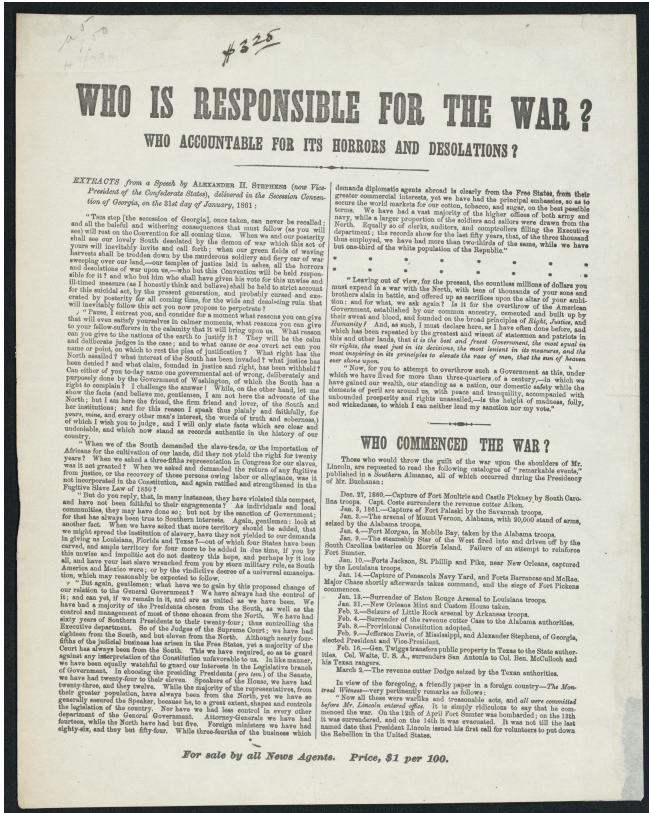
[...] The right of property in slaves was recognized by giving to free persons distinct political rights ... and [burdening] them with direct taxes for three-fifths of their slaves; by authorizing the importation of slaves for twenty years; and by stipulating for the rendition of fugitives from labor.

We affirm that these for which this Government instituted have been defeated, and the Government itself has been made destructive of them by the action of the non-slaveholding States. Those States have assumed the right of deciding upon the propriety of our domestic institutions; and have denied the rights of property established in fifteen of the [slaveholding] States and recognized by the Constitution; they have denounced as sinful the institution of slavery; they have permitted open establishment among them of societies whose avowed object is to disturb the peace... They have encouraged and assisted thousands of our slaves to leave their homes.

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Source B: "Who Is Responsible for the War?" by Alexander H. Stephens, speech published in the *Southern Almanac*, Excerpt (1861). Available through the Teaching Hard History Text Library.



This step [the secession of Georgia] once taken, can never be recalled; and all the useful and withering consequences that must follow (as you will see) will rest on the Convention [Georgia secession convention] for all coming time.

[...] Pause, I entreat, you, and consider for a moment what reasons you can give that will even satisfy yourselves in calmer moments, what reasons you can give to your fellow-sufferers [Southerners] in the calamity that it will bring upon us. What reason can you give to the nations of the earth to justify [secession]? They will be the calm and deliberate judges in this case; and to what cause or *one* overt act can you name or point, on which to rest the plea of justification? What rights have the North assailed? What interest of the South has been invaded? What justice has been denied? And what claim, founded in justice and right, has been withheld? Can either of you to-day name one governmental act of wrong, deliberately and purposely done by the Government of Washington, of which the South has a right to complain?

[...] When we of the South demanded the slave-trade, or the importations of Africans for the cultivation of our lands, did they not yield the right for twenty years? When we asked a three-fifths representation in Congress for our slaves, was it not granted? When we asked and demanded the return of any fugitive from justice, or the recovery of those persons owing labor or allegiance, was it not incorporated in the Constitution, and again ratified and strengthened in the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850?

[...] Again, gentlemen: look at another fact. When we have asked that more territory should be added, that we might spread the institution of slavery, have they not yielded to our demands in giving us Louisiana, Florida, and Texas?—out of which four States have been carved, and ample territory for four more to added in due time, if you by this unwise and impolitic act do not destroy this hope, and perhaps by it lose all, and have your last slave wrenched from you by stern military rule ... or by the vindictive decree of a universal emancipation, which may reasonably be expected to follow."

demands diplomatic agents abroad is clearly from the Free States, from their greater commercial interests, you have had the political movements, so as to secure the world markets for our cotton, tobacco, and sugar, on the best possible terms. We have had a vast majority of the highest officers of the American navy, while a larger proportion of the soldiers and sailors were drawn from the Department of the South, and conscripts filling the Executive thus employed, we have had more than twofifths of the same, while we have had one-third of the whole population of the Republic."

"... Having out of view for the present, the countless millions of dollars you must expend in a war with the North, with loss of thousands of your men and blood, and for what, we ask again? Is it for the overthrow of the American Government, established by your own ancestors, and built up by your own arms and blood, and founded on the broad principles of right, justice, and liberty, which have been the glory of our country, and which have been repeated by the greatest and wisest of statesmen and patriots in this and other lands that is in the last and final Government, the most just in its principles, the most liberal in its measures, and the most humane in its spirit?"

"... For you to attempt to overthrow such a Government as this, while we have gained our wealth, our standing as a nation, our domestic order, while the unbroken property and rights unassailed,—in the height of our peace, liberty, and independence, to which I can neither lend my assent nor my voice."

WHO COMMENCED THE WAR?

Those who would throw the guilt of the war upon the shoulders of Mr. Lincoln, are requested to read the following catalogue of "removable events," published in a Southern Almanac, all of which occurred during the Presidency of Mr. Buchanan:

- Dec. 31, 1850.—Capture of Fort Moultrie and Castle Pickens by South Carolina troops.
 - Jan. 2, 1851.—Capture of Fort Pickens by the Savannah troops.
 - Jan. 2, 1851.—The seizure of South Carolina, Alabama, with 20,000 stand of arms, seized by the Alabama troops.
 - Jan. 4.—The steamship Star of the West fired into and driven off by the South Carolina batteries on Morris Island. Failure of an attempt to reinforce Fort Mifflin.
 - Jan. 10.—Fort Jackson, St. Philip and Pine, near New Orleans, captured by the Louisiana troops.
 - Jan. 14.—Capture of Pensacola Navy Yard, and Fort Barrancas and Mobile Major General Sherman's taking command, and the siege of Fort Pickens commenced.
 - Jan. 14.—Surrender of John Brown's Arsenal in Louisiana troops.
 - Jan. 21.—New Orleans Mill and Custom House taken.
 - Feb. 4.—Surrender of Little Rock Arsenal by Arkansas troops.
 - Feb. 4.—Fort Sumter evacuated.
 - Feb. 4.—Surrender of Fort Mifflin, and Alexander Stephens, of Georgia, Hotel President and Vice-President's property in Texas to the State authorities. Col. Wells, U. S. A., surrenders Fort Antonio to Col. San. Mitchell and his Texas rangers.
 - March 3.—The revenue cutter Dodge seized by the Texas authorities.
- In view of the foregoing, a friendly paper in a foreign country—"The Monitor" (Boston)—very pertinently remarks as follows:
- "How all these were warlike and reasonable acts, and all were committed before Mr. Lincoln entered office. It is strongly intimated to say that some of the war. On the 14th of April Fort Sumter was bombarded; on the 15th it was surrendered, and on the 14th it was evacuated. It was not till the last named date that President Lincoln issued his first call for volunteers to put down the Rebellion in the United States."

For sale by all News Agents. Price, \$1 per 100.

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Source C: “[Nashville Convention Speech](#)” by Robert Rhett, Excerpt (1850). Available through the Teaching Hard History Text Library.

Speaking of the possibility of the emancipation of slavery, [the previous speaker] very happily showed to non-slaveholders here, what their condition would be in such an event [as emancipation]. It would terminate in amalgamation or extermination. . . . Shall the African rule here? No! We will not be governed by the African, neither will we be by the Yankees! We must secede. Georgia will lead off, South Carolina will go with her, Alabama will soon follow, and Mississippi will not be long behind her. . . . Within eighteen months we will have the whole South with us, and more than that; we will extend our borders, we will have New Mexico, Utah, and California. Utah already has slaves. We will march into California, and we will ask them if they will have slaves, and her people well answer, Ay, we will have slaves. And what of Mexico? Why, when we are ready for them, and her people are fitted to come among us, we will take her too, or as much of her as we want.

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Source D: “[Thanksgiving Sermon](#)” by Benjamin Morgan Palmer, Excerpt. (1860). Available through the Teaching Hard History Text Library.

If then the South is such a people, what . . . is their providential trust? I answer, that it is to conserve and to perpetuate the institution of domestic slavery as now existing.

[. . .] Let us, my brethren, look our duty in the face. With this institution assigned to our keeping, what reply shall we make to those who say that its days are numbered? My own conviction is, that we should at once lift ourselves, intelligently, to the highest moral ground and proclaim to all the world that we hold this trust from God, and in its occupancy we are prepared to stand or fall as God may appoint. If the critical moment has arrived at which the great issue is joined, let us say that, in the sight of all perils, we will stand by our trust; and God be with the right! The argument which enforces the solemnity of this providential trust is simple and condensed. It is bound upon us, then, by the principle of self preservation, that “first law” which is continually asserting its supremacy over all others. Need I pause to show how this system of servitude underlies and supports our material interests; that our wealth consists in our lands and in the serfs who till them; that from the nature of our products they can only be cultivated by labor which must be controlled in order to be certain; that any other than a tropical race must faint and wither beneath a tropical sun? Need I pause to show how this system is interwoven with our entire social fabric; that these slaves form parts of our households, even as our children; and that, too, through a relationship recognized and sanctioned in the Scriptures of God even as the other? Must I pause to show how it has fashioned our modes of life, and determined all our habits of thought and feeling, and moulded the very type of our civilization? How then can the hand of violence be laid upon it without involving our existence?

[. . .] The worst foes of the black race are those who have intermeddled on their behalf. We know better than others that every attribute of their character fits them for dependence and servitude. By nature the most affectionate and loyal of all races beneath the sun, they are also the most helpless; and no calamity can befall them greater than the loss of that protection they enjoy under this patriarchal system. Indeed, the experiment has been grandly tried of precipitating them upon freedom which they know not how to enjoy; and the dismal results are before us in statistics that astonish the world.

[. . .] It is a remarkable fact that during these thirty years of unceasing warfare against slavery, and while a lying spirit has inflamed the world against us, [the] world has grown more and more dependent upon it for sustenance and wealth. . . . To

the North we have cheerfully resigned all the profits arising from manufacture and commerce. Those profits they have, for the most part, fairly earned, and we have never begrudged them. We have sent them our sugar and bought it back when refined; we have sent them our cotton and bought it back when spun into thread or woven into cloth. Almost every article we use, from the shoe-latchet to the most elaborate and costly article of luxury, they have made and we have bought; and both sections have thriven by the partnership, as no people ever thrived before since the first shining of the sun ... Even beyond this the enriching commerce which has built the splendid cities and marble palaces of England, as well as of America, has been largely established upon the products of our soil; and the blooms upon Southern fields gathered by black hands have fed the spindles and looms of Manchester and Birmingham not less than of Lawrence and Lowell. Strike now a blow at this system of labor and the world itself totters at the stroke. Shall we permit that blow to fall?

[...] The moment must arrive when the conflict must be joined and victory decide for or the other. As it has been a war of legislative tactics, and not of physical force, both parties have been maneuvering for a position; and the embarrassment has been, whilst dodging amidst constitutional forms, to make an issue that should be clear, simple, and tangible. Such an issue is at length presented in the result of the recent Presidential election ... the North ... have cast their ballot for a candidate [Abraham Lincoln] who is sectional, who represents a party that is sectional, and the group that sectionalism, prejudice against the established and constitutional rights and immunities and institutions of the South. What does this declare—what can it declare, but that from henceforth this is to be a government of section over section; a government using constitution forms only to embarrass and divide the section ruled, and as fortresses through show embrasure the cannon of legislation is to be employed in demolishing the guaranteed institutions of the South? ... I say it with solemnity and pain, this Union of our forefathers is already gone. It existed but in mutual confidence that bonds of which were ruptured in the late election.

[...] The whole influence of the Executive Department of the Government, while in his [Lincoln's] hands, will be thrown against the extension of slavery into the new territories of the Union, and the re-opening of the African slave-trade ... He does not accede to the alleged decision of the Supreme Court [*Dred Scott v. Sanford*], that the Constitution places slaves upon the footing of other property, and protects them as such where its jurisdiction extends...

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Source E: “Corner Stone Speech” by Alexander H. Stephens, Excerpt (1860). Available through the Teaching Hard History Text Library.

The new constitution [of the Confederate States of America] has put at rest, forever, all the agitating questions relating to our peculiar institution African slavery as it exists amongst us the proper status of the negro in our form of civilization. This was the immediate cause of the late rupture and present revolution. Jefferson in his forecast, had anticipated this, as the “rock upon which the old Union would split.” He was right. What was conjecture with him, is now a realized fact. But whether he fully comprehended the great truth upon which that rock stood and stands, may be doubted. The prevailing ideas entertained by him and most of the leading statesmen at the time of the formation of the old constitution, were that the enslavement of the African was in violation of the laws of nature; that it was wrong in principle, socially, morally, and politically. It was an evil they knew not well how to deal with, but the general opinion of the men of that day was that, somehow or other in the order of Providence, the institution would be evanescent and pass away. This idea, though not incorporated in the constitution, was the prevailing idea at that time. The constitution, it is true, secured every essential guarantee to the institution while it should last, and hence no argument can be justly urged against the constitutional guarantees thus secured, because of the common sentiment of the day. Those ideas, however, were fundamentally wrong. They rested upon the assumption of the equality of races. This was an error. It was a sandy foundation, and the government built upon it fell when the “storm came and the wind blew.”

[...] Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea; its foundations are laid, its corner-stone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition.